

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06  
TRSE-00 /061 W  
-----064244 202147Z /65

R 201731Z MAR 78  
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4330  
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN  
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN  
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE  
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG  
AMEMBASSY OSLO  
AMEMBASSY ROME  
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM  
USMISSION USNATO  
AMCONSUL BELFAST  
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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E. O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK  
SUBJECT: SPECULATION ON A SPRING ELECTION

REF: (A) LONDON 2318, (B) LONDON 3548

SUMMARY: A MARCH 19 SUNDAY TIMES REPORT THAT CALLAGHAN  
HAD SCHEDULED A MARCH 20 MEETING WITH LABOR PARTY  
OFFICIALS TRIGGERED SPECULATION THAT HE WILL CALL A  
SPRING GENERAL ELECTION. GOVERNMENT AND LABOR PARTY  
SOURCES HAVE DENIED BOTH THE REPORT AND THE SPECULATION.  
OUR RECENT SOUNDINGS OF PARTY FUNCTIONARIES, GOVERNMENT  
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OFFICIALS AND BACKBENCHERS CONTINUES TO SUPPORT OUR MOST  
RECENT ASSESSMENT THAT THE FALL OF 1978 IS THE MOST  
LIKELY GENERAL ELECTION TIMEFRAME, AND THE ODDS ON IT  
EVENTUATING ARE INCREASING. END SUMMARY.

1. THE MARCH 19 SUNDAY TIMES HEADLINED AN "EXCLUSIVE"  
REPORT OF A PLANNED MARCH 20 MEETING BETWEEN CALLAGHAN

AND PARTY OFFICIALS "CALLAGHAN CALLS ELECTION COUNCIL"  
AND WENT ON TO REPORT INCREASING RUMORS THAT CALLAGHAN  
WILL CALL A MAY ELECTION DURING THE EASTER HOLIDAYS.  
DESPITE DOWNING STREET AND TRANSPORT HOUSE DENIALS THAT  
SUCH A MEETING WAS PLANNED, THE SUNDAY TIMES WENT ON  
TO REPORT THAT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IS ON A "RED  
ALERT" AND THAT THE LIBERALS TOO ARE PLANNING FOR A  
SPRING ELECTION.

2. DURING THE PAST WEEK AN EMBOFF HAD SEPARATE  
MEETINGS WITH LABOR PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY RON HAYWARD,  
NATIONAL ORGANIZER REG UNDERHILL. AND VARIOUS JUNIOR  
MINISTERS AND BACKBENCHERS. ALL DISCLAIMED ANY INSIDE  
INFORMATION AS TO CALLAGHAN'S CURRENT THINKING ON  
ELECTIONS. HAYWARD AND UNDERHILL DESCRIBED THE LABOR  
PARTY'S ELECTION PREPARATIONS AS ROUTINE, SPECIFICALLY  
CITING THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES: A PLANNED MARCH 20  
TUC/LABOR PARTY MEETING TO DISCUSS FINANCING FOR A  
GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND THE RECENT JOINT CABINET/  
NEC MEETING WHICH DEALT LARGELY WITH THE BUDGET, BUT  
ALSO TOUCHED UPON THE NEED FOR A "MODERATE" MANIFESTO  
AND PARTY COHESION. EACH OF THESE CONTACTS FREELY  
SPECULATED ABOUT POSSIBLE ELECTION DATES AND -- DESPITE  
THE FACT THEY HAVE DIFFERING INSTITUTIONAL VIEWPOINTS  
AND REPRESENT THE PARTY'S LEFT, RIGHT AND CENTER --  
AGREED THAT THE FALL OF 1978 IS CURRENTLY THE MOST  
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PROBABLE ELECTION TIMEFRAME. OCTOBER WAS THE UNANIMOUS  
CHOICE AS THE BEST OPTION, WITH EARLY NOVEMBER THE  
SECOND CHOICE. THE SECOND MOST PROBABLE TIMEFRAME,  
THEY AGREED, WAS THE SPRING OF 1979. IN REACHING THESE  
CONCLUSIONS, THEY DESCRIBED RATIONALES WHICH WERE  
VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL TO THAT OUTLINED IN REF A. THERE  
WAS ALSO A CONSENSUS THAT THE COLLAPSE OF THE LIBERAL  
VOTE IN THE ILFORD NORTH BY-ELECTION MADE THE POSSIBI-  
LITY OF ANOTHER ACCORD WITH THE LIBERALS IN THE NEXT  
SESSION OF PARLIAMENT EXCEEDINGLY LOW, THUS MAKING THE  
SPRING 1979 OPTION UNLIKELY.

3. COMMENT: AT THIS POINT WE ARE INCLINED TO DISCOUNT  
THE SUNDAY TIMES SPECULATION ABOUT A SPRING 1978  
ELECTION AS UNFOUNDED. INDEED, THE PREMISE UPON WHICH  
THE STORY WAS BASED -- THE SPECIAL DOWNING STREET  
MEETING -- SEEMS ERRONEOUS. WHILE THE REPORTS OF  
CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL PREPARATIONS ARE NO DOUBT TRUE,  
SUCH ACTIONS WOULD SEEM PRUDENT AND ROUTINE, JUST AS DO  
THOSE OF THE LABOR PARTY. WE WOULD ALSO NOTE THAT  
CALLAGHAN MAY FEEL THERE IS SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL AND  
TACTICAL ADVANTAGE TO BE GAINED BY KEEPING THE OPPOSI-

TION GUESSING AND AT A HIGH STATE OF READINESS FOR A  
PROLONGED PERIOD. OUR CURRENT JUDGMENT IS THAT A  
FALL 1978 GENERAL ELECTION IS CALLAGHAN'S BEST OPTION  
AND THAT ITS CURRENT PROBABILITY, AS COMPARED TO A  
SPRING 1979 ELECTION, IS ABOUT 75/25.

BREWSTER

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
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**Disposition History:** n/a  
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